

FEARLESS



75

Fearless 75

Editor: Kevin m. Hibshman

Contributors:

LINNET PHOENIX

JASON BALDINGER

BARBARA MOORE

COLIN JAMES

JOHN PATRICK ROBBINS

TODD CIRILLO

MICHAEL GROVER

JOHN SWEET

SCOTT SIMMONS

GIOVANNI MANGIANTE

KEVIN M. HIBSHMAN



What Are The Moments That Define Us?

The moment you have to bite someone to avoid suffocating.
The moment you realise nobody can ever justify
a provocation to threaten someone else's life.
The times he tells you he is sorry but he changed
his mind about trying for a baby, twice.
The moment you sit on the floor crying because your mind
floated through the ceiling leaving you behind.

No, our history does not define us.
It merely helped erode the contours of our inner landscape.

How hard we love when faced with certain despair.
What we are prepared to give up, to do the right thing.
If we can sit astride the financial rope swing
and close our eyes and let go, we still win.
When we can be brave and say what we mean,
even if it hurts like amputation of a favourite limb.
When we place kindness on a post-it note stuck to the sun visor,
to reminds us what not to choose.
The moment when we realise love is a butterfly that touches
down many times in a summer's day.

These things are our territory, which show others the way to map us.

Salutation

...and I cast all this to the sky gods...

let powder blue weigh me
let thunder judge my worth
let the rain tax my essence
let lightning strike me down...
If found unworthy
to stand naked, arms raised
in my salutation of your storm...

Fracture

When you hear the ice splitting
they tell you to lie flat.
Distribute your weight over
the surface, spread out.

Don't panic
Don't thrash your limbs
Don't stop breathing
Don't move

Help with come eventually
or spring will melt the ice.

poetry by linnec phoenix

ray

ray worked the diaper factory
salt and pepper hair
salt and pepper beard
he did mechanic work
managed his own line

ray was charming
all the old ladies loved ray
all the women my age
weren't creeped out
when ray gave them a hug
pecked them on the cheek
and called them sweetie

it's after christmas
ray hasn't been to work in days
employees whisper in every corner
gossip, how much ray drinks
at least a case a day

we're called to a meeting
we hear ray passed away

afterward in the lunchroom
whispers get louder, gossip
a holiday with no one
to celebrate
an empty case

ray took his belt
tied it the basement rafters
kicked out his chair

suddenly
all ray's loneliness
slipped away

- jason baldinger

I Should Have Just Gotten You a Card

In the weeks
leading up to her birthday
I paid close attention,
stealthily inquired,
wrote down ideas
of what she may want.
Eventually, I made surprise plans,
fun Amazon orders
and set up a big, bright bouquet
to be delivered the day of.
The night before
her birthday
she called
told me
she found someone new
and that is what she wanted.

The one thing,
I hadn't thought of.

- todd cirillo

True Love

Eventually,
I missed
even
the lies
she told
me.

- todd cirillo



Don't Worry I Hate You Too

My problems are a lot like gunshot wounds.
Because statistically they are mostly self-inflicted.

Or started by a bunch of greedy assholes.

Damn, my sheltered life is a real bitch isn't it?

art & poem by scott simmons

Murder One

I never set out to write pretty lines.
And when it comes to readings.
I go out there to kill, never kiss ass and make friends.

I don't write poetry, I pen chaos with a slice of devilish ecstasy mixed with blood and pain.

I'm loud and reckless because most modern shit sucks.
And someone has to be willing to speak their mind in spite of who it offends.

I never idolized poets but I certainly admired a rockstar.
Because that bygone era held magic, where this one simply takes up space in its pretentious
mundane existence.

Cotton candy holds no substance, as a life not lived full throttle is but a waste of air.

And we are all dying; it's just a matter of when and where.

Drugs are great, sex is far better but a vice all the same.
Silence is beautiful as a night's drive and the full moon over the dark waters is music to my soul.

Friends are a bad idea and an often misused investment of our time.

And this prick staring at me in the mirror has been loyal for the most part.

I won't waste a second on long winded speeches over shit I will never receive.
So sulk in your corner and enjoy blowing smoke up one another's ass.

See you in the rearview my nonexistent friends.

- john patrick robbins

Thank You For Seeing Me

My new found friend told me.

"Don't think Jack, it's not good for you."

And as much as that statement cracked me up it struck a nerve far deeper than he could ever know.

For it was Jules, who always understood when I was getting out there just a bit too far.

My friend saw through the bullshit far too many others got caught up in when most thought of my name.

He didn't view me as some sort of lunatic asshole, who chased death with the setting sun.

And that struck me on a level most reading these lines cannot comprehend.

I have met many people and fooled far more than I truly care to recall.

The best always got through no matter how hard I tried to bullshit them.

I remained silent through most of our conversation.

How can you tell a true friend from the very start?

They are not blinded by their own concerns to not view a train wreck for what it truly is.

He reminded me of someone who I did not want to recall and could never forget.

He was a diamond but not in the rough.

For his soul shined through the most self destructive fog.

To impress an insecure narcissist such as myself.

It felt good to finally exist again.

Thank you my friend.

- john patrick robbins

I Wonder What The Poor Folks Are Reading Today

They say old honest Abe, never told a lie.
But he wore a hat you could take multiple shits in.

As he looked like a meth addict with rabies and had a bat shit crazy wife.

His face is on a penny which is usually brown from time.
And I just spent five seconds rattling off about some old fuck.
I could truly give a damn about.

To entertain someone reading this I will in reality never meet.

Wow, being sober for a week really makes me question.
How some of you fucking people can stay dry for years.

Of course boring people often live vicariously through others.
I will now return you to our normally scheduled drunkard later in the day.

But now let's back to the after school special Flipper In The Sahara.

Or as I like to call it, fish fry.

I know where I'm going.
Care to hold my hand???

Low Battery

When every ounce of energy has been exhausted.
Look back on what you have done and understand.

It is easy to go with the flow.
But anything original must destroy everything within its path including it's host.

You will never live to find acceptance.
But beneath the dark waters maybe you will truly understand peace.

There is nothing left for me to prove.

poetry by john patrick robbins

I, psychedelic voyager

the mountain valley diner
van Morrison is *blowing your mind*
this reality is a little more *tb sheets*

virgil and wayne royo
across fifties decor
amazed I mapped
my teeth, their roots
their nerves on a napkin

amazed as I stop time
while the waitress
waits to trade an acapella
thunder road for a chocolate shake

I've spent too much time
in battle or bar crawl
a brain full of brewer's yeast
while body suited regulars
shake their booties
hypnotic
in that moment the stool blushed

it's hot in this tent
the next wounded soldier
gets whiskey, a bit for his teeth
before the saw goes to work
slow symphony of screams

I never cared for bobby lee's cigars
they smoke like a hurricane
taste like treason

trail riders mount fresh horses
they remember the day
john brown took on harper's ferry
somehow I still see dangerfield newby
die everyday on the internet

by the time I get to martinsburg
the parrots will run off with a gunner
by the time I get to gettysburg

Quick Studies

We learn from pain. One size fits all.
Fastball connects without warning.

Pain is like that. We suck it up.
We learn without tutorials.

- *barbara moorc*

virgil will need to drive
all those big rig lights
and solar flares damn my eyes

*I see the way you jumped at me
lord from behind the door*

it takes lifetimes
to disavow the existence
of god, unless you live a war
or a season at the edge
of america

all groundhogs go to heaven
july is coming, early is late
now burn the bookstall

I know a bar, just outside
the new year, where armies of tvs
are dark, let's slip into our dotage
give in to the interstate
let's disappear

- *jason baldinger*

Losing Faith or WTF

I used to believe
You saw everything --
that you peeled away
the layers of things
like onions
like birthday cakes
like love.

- *barbara moorc*

for the little conemaugh

this charmless winter
shy across asphalt miles
fresh snow melts morning

paul newman scratches
the neck of the dog
that tried to save you

it worked once

I pick factory bones
try to see
try to really see
you, I can't get
past the trauma

the dead eyes
of pretty blondes
waterfalls lurch across
the town square
wait out the last bus
wait out the city mission

there's a red lit sign
jesus saves
there's a pink sombrero
alone at lunch counter

vintage owls
watch over
little conemaugh
I stand with them
on the mountain above
the trees break
another world vista
a hole in the earth

I see a burial party
come to cover you in mud
while that rain brown river
never dredged safe
rages in a concrete bed

this history is suspect
spit out debris
of capitalists
titans of industry
they whisper
it's only mud

it's only mud

- jason baldinger

SPOTTED, SEVERAL SOCIALLY ECUMENICAL-LESS LAND MASSES

An island for part of the day
until the tide remembers.
Gradual kudos like nudes in the sand,
European sensibilities more
subtractive than inhibitive.
Cork soled tennis shoes
will simply float away.
A felicitous walk to the market.
Out of wine, we should
have bought a case.
Not at these prices
too sweet and terminological.

- colin james

Early Rising

Racing dawn, I am cleansed
again by grit of darkness.
Its hypnotic systematic flow
exfoliates rough passage
between night and day.
Light stumbles in blindly
with a touch of defiance.

- barbara moore

Science of Love

Love is a science --
chemistry equations
glimpsed in dreams
and hallucinations.
My eyes fully fill
with minuscule numbers
and capital letters
on the fertile terrain
of your open face.

- barbara moore

Gored

My devotion to you
must have angered the gods.
Waving my red cape
in their faces
was not my brightest move.

- barbara moore

Erase My Life!



art by Scott Simmons

Finding d.a. levy's Grave

We came to this place
Where half of your ashes rest
Middle of nowhere, suburban Cleveland
On a pilgrimage,
As if Poetry were sacred & holy
& we came to pray
As if Poetry were religion
& you were a martyr
As if it were a different reason
& we were not in Cleveland
For a second opinion on my cancer

We'd been told the grave would be hard to find
So I went into the office
Where the lady gave me a map
That was impossible to read
Highlighting your space
& pointed me in the right direction

We walked around for at least twenty minutes
An endless field of plaques on the ground
Dan looked up a picture online
Said it was by the road
& I found you there
Humble plaque in a field of plaques
Childish mountain scene on it
Darryl Allen Levy
Not famous Poet
Not publisher
Not instigator
It simply read *Son*
& I guess you were someones son
I am someones son
All of these people in this field
Were someones sons or daughters
We could have been standing at the wrong grave
We could have been standing at any grave
Ground caving in around the plaque

Tonight solitude, isolation
That I know I brought on myself
But dogs are fiercely loyal
Much more loyal than people
But that's the isolation of the Poet
It repeats tragically through his-story
It is a solitary process
Crickets hum, facing a dark Autumn sky

- michael grover

[what matter or what consequence]

this kingdom a
kingdom of hollow prayer just like
any other, and shoot the man who
tells you you're wrong

set the child on fire

strength feeds on fear,
expands,
leaves no room for mercy

feels good, though, right?

your cock up
god's honeyed ass

the shared weakness of lovers

nothing left in the age of gold
for any us really
but to kill or be killed

- john sweet

other shades of nil

unborn child takes a bullet
between the eyes but
i'm still working on the punchline

i'm still trying to explain the
humor in the
news of the drowning boy

i'm still in love with every
wasted day you and i
ever spent together

it's a life, yes,
but it's no way to live

- john sweet

Impermanence
(Eulogy For Amiri Baraka And The Collingwood Arts Center)

-1-

Lately I've been thinkin' too much
About impermanence
How there is no comfort
Brutal Winter howling outside
Place I call home
Crumbling around me
I don't know what to think
I'm paralyzed
I know change is coming like a truck
& I miss Brian because he would always tell me
This place is always gonna be here no matter what happens
He always told us this building has been through a lot
And it would always be here
But I know Brian's ghost
Still haunts these halls

Now I get on the internet to find out you're gone
You, my personal hero is dead
& I've been thinkin' about impermanence
I am still shell shocked
I am paralyzed
I just want to get fucked up
Beyond recognition
& celebrate the death of this World
I just want to numb myself
From the cold hard snow
Of the polar vortex

-2-

My mentor in LA
Always told me I would never know you
Until I saw you read
Until I saw you read in Philly
I called him to tell him he was right

It was a religious experience
You grabbing your balls
The whole time you read
Lauren asking me
Why you were grabbing your balls
Like I knew Mr. Mojo magic man
You shaking my hand after the reading
All I could muster to say was *It's an honor*
I was shankin' hands with God

-michael grover

palace of ashes

age of sorrow, age of
fear or age of failure

stand too close and
they all look the same

let your house
fall down around you

touch god
with dirty hands

by february, i am
sick of making sense

silence of 2 a.m. is
broken by dripping water,
by the muttering of
clocks in dark rooms and
strange cars idling on
frozen streets

no one is your
friend at this hour

the baby is torn in two
by its parents

they just keep
screaming their love at
each other until the
body bleeds itself
dry

-john swect

It was a religious experience

-3-

I just want to watch Bullworth tonight
Just to hear you say *You got to be a spirit,*
You can't be no ghost!

-4-

Lately I've been thinkin' too much
About impermanence
How it could be right around the corner

-5-

Hey Roi,
Last night I painted *Amiri Baraka Lives!* on the wall
Like you were Ted Jones not LeRoi
There is writing on the wall from last night
As I was tellin' stories about
You & Lamont Steptoe
There is writing on the wall

-6-

I've been thinkin' about impermanence
Neon liquor stores
Cheap malt liquor high
Cheap street weed paranoia
Escape from what
Just a temporary escape
Over and over
I've been thinkin' about impermanence

- michael grover

My First Drug Dealer

The kid had an egghead and a scrawny body.
Obviously, a natural fit at our high school.

He sold me cheap vodka for 20 dollars.
A water bottle full of "moonshine" for 40 dollars.

And about 15 dollars "worth" of weed.

He would only laugh or smiled for half a second.
And you just always knew you couldn't trust him.

He bailed ass as soon as we got busted for acid.
And got sent to Hi Point after one semester.

I never saw him again but here's my advice:
Don't get burned by a weirdo with a short dick.

- scott simmons

A Tale of Two Pussies

When I first got her I realized.
"Shit, I have to take care of her."

Now she's beginning to think:
Oh shit, HE's taking care of me.

He smells like ass and cigarettes.
But at least he leaves me stuff.

While she thumps around all night.
And quietly watches me take a piss.

But I wouldn't trade her for the world.

- scott simmons

Cullen Park

-1-

Crow takes off from branch
Carrion; signifying the death of something

-2-

It was you that first brought me here
Where river meets lake
Sittin' on a log
Toes in the sand
Staring out at endless Lake Eerie
Where water meets horizon
There was so much joy
You took found objects home
& made art out of them
Showing me the beauty in everything
I think that was the last time I was happy

Now I sit alone
I have happy memories
I smile
I feel peace, zen, nothing
All I really wanted all along

-3-

Yellow finch lands on branch
Fills the air with song
Then gone in a flash

-4-

Mallard duck lands on water
Floats on the glassy lake
With two other ducks

-5-

Egret flies by
Flying down the shore
Two other birds fly the other way
Bad Brains *Leaving Babylon* plays
I wish I could

-6-

A Writer's Exit

I would have
checked out,
disappeared,
ended it all
long ago
but I keep
revising the note.
Over and over
again and again
I change one word
or move sentences around,

wondering whether
to write in present
or past tense,
what is the proper
closing salutation?
Multiple crumbled-up drafts
of one note.
Too vain to leave
anything
less than spectacular.
Always hoping
to gain
some
new fans,
no matter
the cost.

-todd cirillo

(previously published in *Kisses From A Straight Razor* (Epic Rites Press))

I understand
I don't think anyone understands this broken tribe
Like we understand each other
I'm surrounded, reminded every day
How broken we all are
I don't know if people get
What they did to us when they closed the place
But image is everything

-7-

Ant next to the journal
Living in an ant's universe
Runs down a huge log

-8-

Crow comes back
Jumps from branch to branch
Bending with the wind
Flies off

-9-

Beer can floats on water
Shiny blue aluminum
Waves bang it against rocks

-10-

The sound of water
Lapping at the shore, rocking
Has always relaxed me

-11-

It's nice to sit
Next to the tall marsh grass
Smoking grass
I will sit here and write poems
With my feet in the sand
I will write until my soul is clean
Then I'll write some more
Then I will walk away

-12-

Looking at the mills on the river
Industry at what cost

first suicide attempt: an anniversary song

wakes up to snow and then a
nosebleed in the bathroom sink

a dream of bodies stacked like firewood
in an ash grey basement

a child laughing or
maybe the roof caving in

maybe the woman next door
setting her baby on fire
in the middle of the street

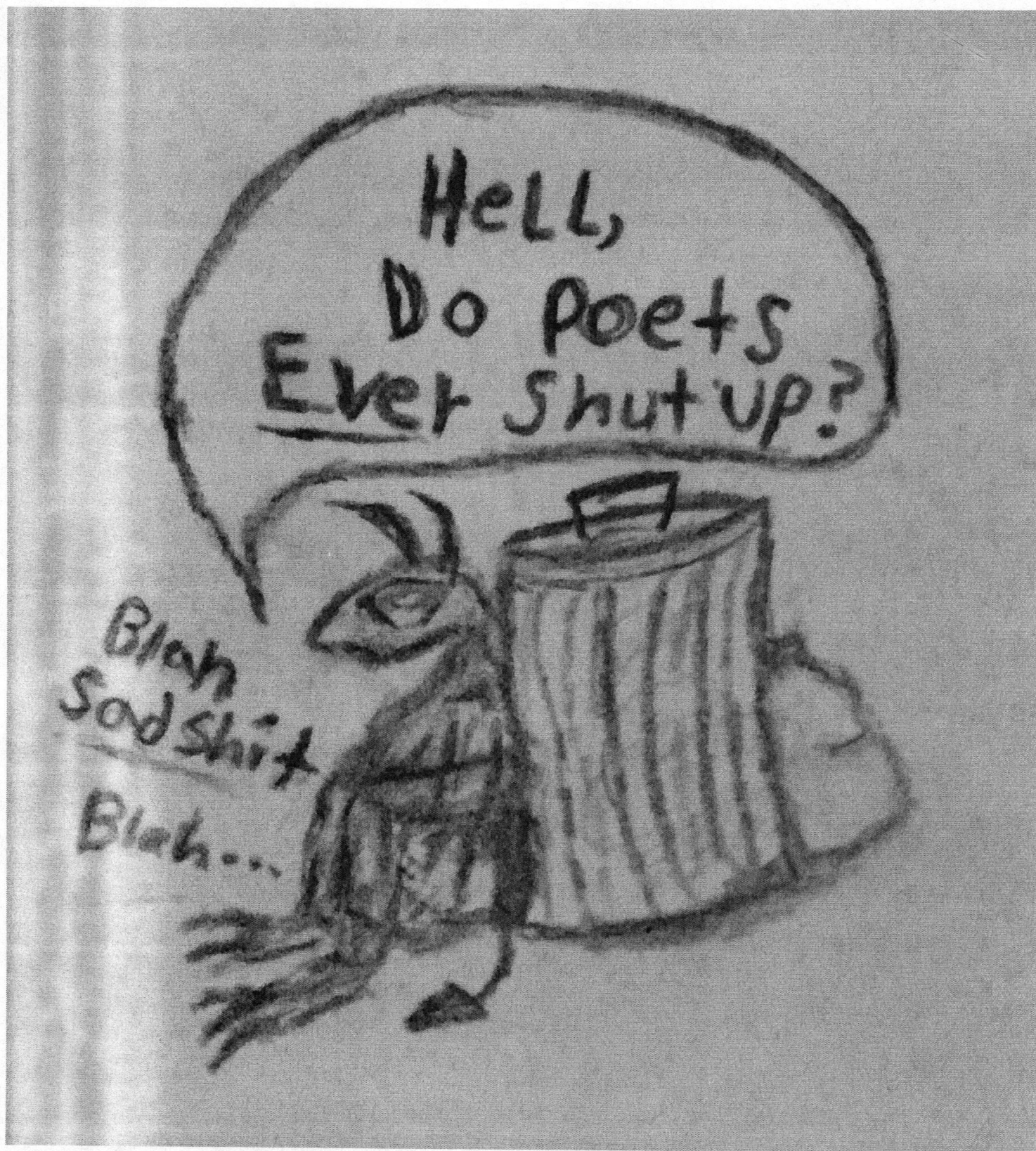
a life lived like some
raymond carver short story but
which one?

how many pages until the ending?

this shit is important

- john sweet

- michael grover



art by Scott Simmons

childhood fragment #2

never being a fighter but a scrawny kid with birth defect
drew to me, since kindergarten, all kinds of bullies.
they pestered me with names, insults,
stole my food and excluded me from their teams.
i grew up like this.

my parents went to the school and placed complaints,
spoke with teachers, parents, and school principal.
it didn't stop.

the last year of kindergarten, i found out the only way
is to throw hands at the odds like
a motherfucker who has nothing to live for.
one of the bullies approached me,
and the insults began one more time. i listened.
i took another shove, grabbed my yellow lunchbox
and cracked the plastic open on his head from the side
in a swing that had been building up for years.

he ran towards the teacher, crying.
i stood in the center of the classroom eyeing the others.
"what is wrong with you? i'm calling your parents!"
yelled the teacher while pressing the sobbing bully
against her fat stomach.

somehow, i was the bad guy.
i was the bad guy, and it felt good.

- giovanni mangiante

ugly man

ugly man, she said,
ugly man, write me poems
about your tar-stained crooked teeth
and twisted fingers
and muscle atrophy.

ugly man, she said,
you better not fuck
as depressingly as you write
as depressingly as you sing
as depressingly as you walk.

ugly man, she said,
why can't you be positive for once?
can't you see how much fun I'm having?
ugly man, people like me
don't need any help.
we're alright.

ugly man, when god spat on your mud
he didn't do so with blessings, it seems.
you know? I think he came in mine,
spat on yours, and pissed on the rest.

ugly man, smile!
they taught me in school we were all equal
in the end.

- giovanni mangiantc

i got it all figured out

my plan is to spend all my savings
on a plane ticket to New Zealand
and set up camp under
a bridge to live my days as a vagabond.
i'll yell prophecies
to whoever
decides to approach my tent,
and scribble delirious poems on the walls,
backwards and upside down
with charcoal,
and then a nice lady
born in india—who looks korean
and lives in New Zealand
will madly
fall in love with me,
and she'll visit me twice a week
to bring me wine and boiled potatoes,
and New Zealand and her name
will be the only things
i ever write in capital letters
until they burn down my tent
and copyright
all my backwards upside-down poems
to different names for an anthology
about god and all the angels
destroying humanity down to the last
atom.

- giovanni mangiante

It's Piling Up

The nervous exhaustion from having too little to do and
too much time to think about it.
Monotony kills and my mind is a glass-bottomed boat tossed upon
a raging sea.
It's been a deadening two years worth of anticipation.

I miss the simple life I somehow managed to cut a deal with.
People forget about the ostracized and the isolated, burdened as they are with
their own concerns.
There never is enough hope to go around though we often need to
fool ourselves into believing otherwise.
I smoke and smoke and stare out the third floor window at the pathetic semblance
of a life trying to survive itself.
Meanwhile, stress builds up like two weeks worth of garbage I forgot to take out and mounds of cat shit
in a neglected litter box.

Kevin M. Hibshman

Coyote Howl

You graduated early from the school of hard knocks complete with
several concussions.
You sharpened your wits on the sniggers and sneers of less intelligent beings.
You possess the hands of a mad genius, making everything you touch shine
brighter, cut deeper and move faster but ultimately too beautiful to last.
Your heavy Viking heart beats too strong, loves too hard and howls like
a lone coyote on the hill, pining for the waxing moon.
It will be the death of you.

Kevin M. Hibshman

BOOK REVIEW:

THE EDITORS MANIFESTO BY SCOTT SIMMONS

WHISKEY CITY PRESS, 2021.

Anyone who has ever attempted to perform the often challenging job of editing will no doubt relate to this caustic but humorous book. It is a totally honest account of the funny lives we writers try to lead. This is Scott's first book and he takes an imaginative, sometimes unpredictable approach that keeps you turning the pages. Just when you are thoroughly drenched in his sardonic wit, he startles you with an intensely human personal revelation. He likes to shift gears but he keeps the engine throttling. This kid has unlimited potential. I'm happy that he included some of his notorious artwork as well. You can read a few samples of his work in this issue. I highly recommend this book to anyone who could use a laugh, a cry, a joke, a fine read.

Kevin M. Hibshman 5/21

WE LEAVE YOU WITH SOME FINE QUOTES:

"I discovered that if one looks a little closer at this beautiful world, there are always red ants underneath," David Lynch.

"The artist's task is to save the soul of mankind; and anything less is a dithering while Rome burns. If artists cannot find the way, then the way cannot be found." Terence McKenna.

"I have a potent degree of love that is so unwise in one world that it is wisdom in another." Sun Ra.

"They say pot smoking affects your memory, man. Yeah, but at least it doesn't affect your memory, man." Cheech and Chong.